/Salars/

563 794 179 184 Chinese life for a longer period of time; geographical isolation of those in the west; arrival in the west of the "New Sect," among whom are the Salars, dedicated to reform the older residents; and the fact that many in the east are mere converts.

[144] [262] [202] [203] The Moslems in Kansu are further set apart by the physical characteristics of their Tatar ancestry. Also contributing to the general physical condition of the Moslems is their tendency to eat more meat, drink more milk, and indulge less in wine and opium than the Chinese.

563 794 795 The Salars are Moslems of the Shiah division and of the "New Sect." (See chapter about Religion.) The majority of the Moslems in China are of the "Old Sect" and much better assimilated than the "New Sect." The "New Sect" is prevalent mainly in the west of China, and as indicated earlier, their lack of assimilation is due to an obsession to reform the older residents, and is accompanied by extreme fanaticism and intolerance. Amont this "New Sect" the Salars are the most fanatic of all and it may be that they excel in this tendency because of their isolation. Salar stubbornness is further revealed in the practice of the women, who persist in wearing the ancient dress of Samarkand.

563 794 [198] [346] Because the Moslems in China have throughout history persecuted and been persecuted, they display a certain caution in the practice of their religion in areas where they are not abundant. For example the mosques may often be architecturally designed to assume a Chinese style, and if they are in a decided minority the mosques will be constructed without a minaret. In such cases the muezzin will refrain from giving his calls. The isolated Salars, however, are more strict than most Moslems in certain observances. The women, [562] for instance, are still required to wear the veil while absent from their immediate home neighborhood.

563 794 795 Although there have been attempts in the past by the Moslems to set up their own state in North-West China, their internal division over religious questions makes their unification a difficult task because the Chinese leaders take advantage of this weakness and play one faction against another. It also seems to be the opinion that more than a religious basis is necessary in order to establish any sort of political entity. The Moslems are further handicapped in the field of practical political action in the modern world by the fact that it is nearly an impossibility to attain both a Koranic education and a modern education, an inherent requirement for coping with modern conditions in directing the establishment of a bona fide Moslem state. Even if some type of autonomous Moslem government were set up, the isolation, small population, and eccentricity of the Salars probably would

RELIGION

I. Historical Background of the Religions of Inner Asia

791 795 Various religions have been strong in the Northwest, among them Shamanism, Buddhism, Nestorianism, Manichaeism, Confucianism, Taoism and Islam. The latter is the predominant religion among the Turks and the Dungans. Buddhism is the religion of the Mongols, Mongours, Shira Yögür and Tibetans. Nestorianism and Manichaeism have become extinct, but Confucianism and Taoism are still alive in Chinese communities (see China Handbook).

A. Shamanism

771 756 Shamanism is a pagan faith based upon concepts of demons and spirits, with whom the Shaman, or priest, attempts to maintain contact by either sending his soul to them or receiving them into his own soul. The Shaman usually functions in a self-induced trance, produced by taking alcoholic beverages, toadstool powder, et cetera. A high percentage of Shamans suffer from various neuroses, severe forms of hysteria, or epilepsy, and the selection of a new Shaman may be based upon such manifestations of a deviant personality. Sometimes, however, the position of Shaman is hereditary.

[787] [293] [296] [158] [428]

756 The Shaman is regarded as a mediator between man and the supernatural. He exercises his magic powers for such purposes as healing, rain-making, success in hunting, prevention of accidents, and divination. In central Asia, the common methods of divination are by the flight of birds and by scapulimancy, or interpretation of cracks on the shoulderblade of a sheep which has been treated over a fire. While functioning in his supernatural capacity, the Shaman wears a distinctive dress, usually a long robe decorated with metal discs, small bells and the claws of the totem birds.

[787] [292]

The training of a Shaman is long and involved, and he usually does not reach full professional status until the age of forty or fifty. Shamanists have no ecclesiastical organization, but rank Shamans on the basis of their success in dealing with the supernatural.

756 77 Besides the various ghosts, ancestral and animal spirits and other lesser supernatural beings, the Shamanists recognize a supreme being, the Tengri, who is the universe personified, God and heaven. He is the fountain of life, as he gives man his soul, and the fate of all peoples depends upon him. The Altaic people believe that the Tengri observes all and everything; no

171 776

*563 262 on special occasions, enjoy many Chinese dishes, or Tibetan adaptations of them. One of the most popular dishes is a sort of steamed dumpling stuffed with meat. Another is whole mutton, semi-raw or roasted and eaten off the bone. A favorite beverage [273] is a mildly fermented beer of barley or other grain. A more spirituous liquor is also widely appreciated.

Vegetables are scarce and usually are purchased from the Chinese or Chinese Moslems on the Sino-Tibetan border. At that they are limited mostly to potatoes and onions. The nomadic Tibetans have little fondness for green vegetables and accept them to a lesser extent than do the sedentary groups.

B. The Predominant Diseases Among the Tibetans

*563 164 The most common diseases include the venereal diseases, stomach and intestinal disorders, rheumatism, eye and skin diseases and tuberculosis. Perhaps because of the cold climate, the high altitude and the consequent absence of flies, and the use of animal manure instead of night-soil for fertilizing the fields, cholera, typhoid and similar excrement-borne diseases are rare.

The incidence of some diseases seems correlated to whether the people are nomadic or sedentary. For example, Ekvall (1939) reports a higher incidence of syphillis among the agricultural Tibetans, and a somewhat higher gonorrhea rate among the nomads. Leprosy is practically unknown among the nomads but is very common among the farmers. One can infer that rheumatism would be more frequent among the nomads than among the farmers because of the former's greater exposure to chills and dampness. In common with other Tibetans and peoples of the inland areas whose supply of salt is from Tibet's salt lakes, goiters are prevalent. The digestive ailments may be attributed to the frequent inclusion of foreign matter, such as sheep wool or yak hair, in the food, and also to some of the methods used in food preparation. The eye ailments, can be traced in part to the venereal disease rates, in part to the hazards of wind, dust, smoke, and snow-glare on the high plateaus. The skin troubles may be traceable to the customs of rarely washing more than the hands and face, of never completely removing one's clothes, and the numerous population that shares the sheepskin garment with its human host.

Other health hazards among the Tibetans include infections of accidental and non-accidental wounds (many a child has suffered severe burns) incurred in raids. The Tibetans seem to have an extremely low resistance to epidemic diseases such as smallpox, scarlet fever and influenza. Ekvall reports that the Tibetans even [751] suffered violent reactions to vaccination, quite out of proportion to their neighbors, the Chinese and Chinese Moslems. However, this low resistance is accompanied by a high fear of these infec- [758] tions. The tradition of strict quarantine, even to the point of

N.W.China AF13
Tu ren

563 With a child-like smile he watched the performances, sipped
527 quantities of salted tea out of huge silver vessels and received
545 Tibetan visitors to the fair who came sliding up to him humbly on their knees with their hats under their arms, kissed the hem of his cloak and in turn received his blessing through imposition. /252/

541 Every day around noon during the fair week horse-owners and
527 fanciers assembled on a meadow somewhat apart and arranged
563 horse races, i.e., each of the competitors felt he had the best pacer. High trotters were never seen, they would have been ridiculed. Galloping was also considered a great mistake, as is generally the case among all East Asiatic horsemen. There was general approval only when one of the vigorous ponies outdistanced his rivals on the short track in the midst of the eager spectators, at a pace gait (always left front foot and left hind foot together, then right front and back, which for our feeling is such an ugly gait). The horses were spurred on by the riders with short whips which they held straight in front of themselves, and they shouted and called in harsh, jubilant voices. The crowd joined in, screaming with joy and enthusiasm and the friends and acquaintances received the happy owner of the winning horse with upturned thumbs, and praised the horse and the cleverness of its rider to the skies. Again and again he was obliged to appear and cover the track which extended only about 400-500 meters at a flying pace in the midst of the audience which was also largely mounted, and try his luck with new arrivals. If the horse only once fell into a gallop, everyone became critical and the owners who had previously been less fortunate, then had the scoffers and shouters on their side once
[492] more. The riders who were Tu ren, but also Tibetans and Mohammedans, had very short stirrup straps, like all Central Asiatic horsemen, so that the lower part of their thighs is braced almost horizontally against the horse.

[526] There were also stone-throwing and wrestling matches, just as
[273] at the ancient Mongolian festivals of which Marco Polo tells. But the famous Wei yüan bu liquor was also duly appreciated. Round about the fair grounds groups of men and women assembled, especially young people. They gathered into groups according to the tribes and valleys to which they belonged, each one around a jug of barley schnapps (Plate LIII). Boys and girls squatted on the ground in a
533 gay throng. Again and again the little jug made the rounds among
527 them and meanwhile they sang their ancient folksongs of love, of
563 the old kings and champions and their heroic deeds. Even at night

N.W. China AF 13
Kalmyk

the Piedmont gravel and the salt swamps north of this. 000

From the Dsun yurts where we first met people again, we took an 361
easterly course and after two more travel-days we came to Barun kurä. In the belt of meadowland which we followed there stood yurts in groups of three and four of first Dsun- and then Barun- Mongols. Like the old Jew who sold ribbons in the market of my home town, I extolled my wares in the tents. I exchanged butter, barley and sheep for my hardware and my silver. The people were always friendly to 609
us. We slept and ate in their dwellings. At first they seemed sullen, but they warmed up after closer contact and they laughed and sang with Han and Tsch'eng. Most of the men spoke Tibetan as well as [191]
Mongolian. I became acquainted with their happy-go-lucky way of living. Their liquor plays a great part in their lives, and they make 273
it from mare's milk. The men travel from one tent to another, drink and sing, while the women have the duty of taking care of the work and of the herd animals. But although the women are obliged to 562
shoulder the burden of the household, and increase the fortunes of the family, they are by no means the slaves of the men. One old man who wanted to sell me a few sheep on my visit from yurt to yurt was given such a severe lecture by his wife who did not agree to the sale, the lecture even being punctuated by a raised stick, that my companions were forever cured of their initial great enthusiasm for Mongol women. The Mongol woman, it is true, enjoys great freedom compared to the Chinese woman. The women of the Dam Mongols have an astonishing amount of authority for Asiatic women!

The Tsaidam Mongols (Chinese: Dam men gu) do not have high 428
moral standards. As in many other parts of Tibet, the son, when he has reached his majority, gets the family property even though the father is still living and the parents get a certain share set aside for them. This is a very old custom. It was said to have arisen during the times when people still set out on wars of conquest. The men capable of bearing arms, who set out to war and who were able actively to protect their families, were also /349/ the owners of the family property. Now, however, the young Dam Mongols try to shirk their 888
responsibilities as much as possible. Today they are little more than warriors and, besides, they give their old parents barely enough to live on. I often saw two old people behind a protective wall that was full of holes and squatting on a dung heap like beggars while their son lived beside them in a fine yurt.

Marriages of the Dam Mongols seem to be entered upon as casual- 586
ly as they are dissolved. After a couple has lived together for a while